

Luke 4: 1-13
The Temptation of Christ
Sunday 21 February 2010, Broxbourne & Wormley

'A newly married sailor was informed by the Navy that he was going to be stationed for a year a long way from home on a remote island in the Pacific. A few days after he got there he really began to miss his new wife, so he wrote a letter.

"My love," he wrote, "we are going to be apart for a very long time. Already I'm starting to miss you and there's not much to do here in the evenings. Besides that, we're constantly surrounded by young attractive native girls. Do you think if I had a hobby of some kind I would not be tempted?"

So his wife sent him back a harmonica saying, "Why don't you learn to play this?"

Eventually his year of duty came to an end and he rushed back to see his wife. "Darling," he said, "I can't wait to see you for a cuddle!"

She kissed him, then said, "First, let's hear you play that harmonica."

Temptation is all around us! This morning, we reflect again on the temptation of Christ – that battle between good and evil.

Let's look briefly at this well-known passage again... 2 points to note first:

1. This a very sacred story – no other sources but Jesus himself...
2. Jesus must already have been conscious of the exceptional powers given to him by God through the Holy Spirit. The whole point of the temptations is that they could only have come to a man who could do extraordinary things.

It is no temptation to us to turn stones into bread or leap from the top of a temple – for the simple reason that it is impossible.

Temptations could only come to a man with unique powers – and who also had to decide how to use them.

But that doesn't mean that they only apply to Jesus...on the contrary, they hold meaning and message for us all – in very real and relevant ways.

Temptation 1 – to turn stones into bread...(v.3)

The wilderness where Jesus was was not of sand. There would have been lots of pieces of limestone shaped like bread loaves.

What Satan is saying here is, *'If you want people to follow you, use your remarkable powers to give them the material things they want.'* In other words, bribe people to follow you.

Jesus was hungry for food – why not give in and just provide what he wanted?

Anyone here who knows children, knows too, that the right thing to do is **not** always to give them what they want...otherwise it would be pizza and coca-cola for every meal!

No, simply providing material wants is not the key to a whole and right life.

'Man does not live on bread alone.' (v.4). We won't find LIFE in material things. The call of the Christian is not to simply produce the conditions in which people live – though the work of the Church to make a material difference to the lives of those in need is important. The call of the Christian, the follower of Jesus Christ, is to produce **new people** for God. Given new people for God, then the right conditions and material well-being will follow.

This is so relevant this is for today – when we see all around the consequences in society of acquiescing to the temptation to grasp at material things first – nations and individuals on the brink of bankruptcy...(E.G. recent viewing of debt programme on TV...)

Next, v.5, the devil dangles worldly power in front of Jesus.

But this temptation is not simply about holding this power. It is about compromising your belief and faith in God.

What the devil in effect says is that he has the ability and power to hold all of us in his grasp – and he offers that to Jesus – **if** he will compromise in his love for God.

Back comes Jesus (v.8)... *“It is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’”*

The Word of God is uncompromising. God is God, and right is right and wrong is wrong. There can be no compromise in the battle against evil.

But it’s a constant temptation - for us all, to seek popularity or an easy life, by compromising with the standards of the world – standards that so often find themselves in conflict with the Word of God. With increasing frequency that we hear politicians with secular agendas, telling the Church of Christ what they should believe and do. Is it their place to set up another quango or enquiry into re-writing the Word of God to suit their appeal to popularity? No...

(I don’t hear them making similar demands of other faiths...)

G.K Chesterton said that the tendency of the world is to see things in terms of an indeterminate gray; but the duty of the Christian is to see things in black and white.’

I daresay today, such a view would increasingly be seen to be politically incorrect. But who is God here? What is his holy word worth of we succumb to this temptation and pressure?

Remember the lives of so many through the ages who have given their lives rather than give in and compromise their faith in the God of God, the Light of Lights.

Finally, v.9, Jesus saw himself at the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem – with a 450 feet drop into the Kedron Valley below. Here we have the temptation to give people sensations.

Jesus’ response, v.12, again quoting scripture, is to warn the devil off testing God. ‘Don’t make senseless experiments with the power of God.’ Don’t demean the majesty and holiness of God Almighty by expecting him to put on a dramatic display in order to win people’s loyalty.

You and I know deep down, that with faith in anything or anyone, it’s all about hearts and minds. Look what happened in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. No amount of post war, Cold War displays of military strength by tanks, troops, or nuclear arms race could win the loyalty and following of many different nations. Powerful though the USSR might have been, impressive though the parades in Moscow were each year, it never won hearts and minds.

The sensationalist, from David Blane and his remarkably dramatic ‘magic’ of today, to the OTT displays of military power and might of despots, will never last. Only the power and love of God lasts for all eternity.

All Christians find themselves struggling with temptations such as these; to look for satisfaction in material things before God, to compromise our belief in God and God’s word to suit, to test God through seeking sensation and thrill.

We constantly struggle with the temptation to dilute the quality and even exchange the object of our Christian commitment during our walk of faith.

That’s why it’s always a good thing, both as individuals and as a church body/ family, to regularly commit / re-commit ourselves to the service of God, to His Way, His Truth, His Life. And that’s why we are providing the space for us to be able to do this together in our services next Sunday. There will be quiet time for personal reflection and prayer – the opportunity to join in with a joint prayer together – and the symbolic ‘taking action’, by presenting that commitment at communion, visibly expressing our solidity with our God and Father as we bring up, either personal pledges or commitment cards printed out for the services and provided in the pews.

Following communion, we shall then pray for those commitments placed on the communion table, and ask for God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, to help us be his people here in Broxbourne and Wormley during this year.

The life of service and suffering which leads to the cross can often be a hard one – full of temptations to veer off course on the way.

But after the Cross comes the crown.

John Wesley wrote, *'In the greatest temptations, a single look to Christ, and the bare pronouncing of his name, suffices to overcome the wicked one, so it be done with confidence and calmness of spirit.'*

As we reflect during this Lent, let's not let our own commitment to Jesus be compromised, but rather let our commitment be proclaimed for all to hear.

Let's pray.

Ian Tomkins. 21/02/10